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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6574  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0542  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4074  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7632  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5191  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0977  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000924

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS; INR/EAP; S/ES-O/CMS; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: GOB TRIES TO DEFEND ITS ACTIONS AGAINST PROTESTORS

REF: A. RANGOON 913 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. USUN 794

Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for Reasons 1.4  
(b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Deputy Foreign Minister U Maung Myint on September 27 relayed to the diplomatic corps the GOB's version of "real" political situation. He argued that the 88 Generation Students, the NLD, and the U.S. Government were behind the marches, forcing monks to protest and that the government had exercised restraint in dealing with the protestors. The EU Ambassadors criticized the GOB's handling of the situation, encouraged the government to open a dialogue with the opposition, and called for the release of political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi. The UNDP Country Coordinator noted that Ibrahim Gambari was ready to assist Burma at any time, but the MFA refused to comment on a possible Gambari visit. The Singaporean Ambassador told us that Gambari is scheduled to arrive in Burma on September 29, although he does not yet have a visa. U Maung Myint confirmed that Aung San Suu Kyi remains under house arrest in her residence. End Summary.

MFA Delivers the "Truth"

[1](#)2. (C) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the diplomatic corps to Nai Pyi Taw for a briefing on the political situation on September 27. During his forty-minute speech, Deputy Foreign Minister U Maung Myint explained that the Burmese Government was working to maintain peace and stability throughout the country. He denied that the protests since September 19 were led by monks, and instead accused the 88 Generation Students, the NLD, and the U.S. Government of instigating the demonstrations. Political activists, he stated, forced monks into demonstrating against the government - a statement printed on the front page of the New Light of Myanmar. Noting that only 5,000 monks out of the 500,000 monks living in Burma participated in the protests, U Maung Myint explained that the "rogue monks" did not represent the Burmese Buddhist community.

[1](#)3. (C) U Maung Myint acknowledged that the police on September 26 opened fire on protestors which resulted in one death and more than 10 injuries, but emphasized that the

government has shown restraint when dealing with the protestors. Claiming that the GOB only detained 30 political activists since the protest began in August, he commented that more than 200 anti-Iraq war protestors were arrested in Washington D.C. several weeks ago. He rhetorically inquired why no one condemned the U.S. for their violations of freedom of speech.

#### Diplomatic Community Speaks Out

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¶4. (C) After the briefing, the French Ambassador presented his government's views on the current situation and reminded the GOB that the EU governments were monitoring the situation very closely. The French Government strongly condemned the GOB's use of violence against the protestors and urged the Burmese to abstain from violence. The French Ambassador also requested that the GOB enter into an open dialogue with the opposition, and called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and the other political prisoners. The Italian and German Ambassadors echoed these remarks, and also encouraged the GOB to allow foreign media to monitor the political situation.

¶5. (C) U Maung Myint chose not to respond to these remarks, and instead pointed out that the GOB keeps Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest to maintain peace and stability in the country. In a side meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister, we learned that Aung San Suu Kyi has not/not been moved to a prison and remains under house arrest in her residence. U Maung Myint affirmed that she still has access to medical treatment. He also rejected suggestions of a dialogue, claiming the GOB had an open dialogue during the National Convention process. The NLD, he emphasized, opted to not join in that process and therefore has no right to complain

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about the outcome.

Gambari Waiting in the Wings  
But Burmese Not Ready to Receive

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¶6. (C) UNDP Country Coordinator Charles Petrie informed U Maung Myint that Ibrahim Gambari stood ready to visit Burma at any time. He also remarked that the United Nations remained committed to address the key socio-economic issues felt by the people - the very reasons why people are protesting in the first place. Instead of addressing a possible Gambari visit, U Maung Myint claimed that the Burmese people, who earn an average of \$1/day, were above the world poverty line.

Because living costs are low in Burma, they earn enough to be sufficient, he explained. The Burmese Government expects new foreign direct investment, foreign loans and assistance in the future. He commented that Burma is taking steps toward democracy; the international community must be patient.

¶7. (C) Singapore Ambassador told Charge that Gambari has reservations to depart Singapore for Rangoon on Silk Air on September 29 (Ref B). After the Charge said that the Burmese refused to address Gambari's visit and he still does not yet have a visa, the Ambassador responded that Gambari would wait in Singapore.

#### International Press Access

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¶8. (C) The Brunei Ambassador inquired whether the MFA was approving visas for international press, and noted that several foreign correspondents were afraid of being arrested.

U Maung Myint explained that the Ministry of Information, not the MFA, adjudicates press visas. The GOB was willing to allow foreign correspondents to enter Burma, he stressed, but officials are wary that these foreigners will exaggerate the situation to make Burma look bad. Foreign press, such as CNN and BBC, do not provide balanced views. The senior

leadership has no plans to talk to the people or the press directly, he continued, and the MFA requested that the diplomatic corps present the GOB version of the truth to the press.

#### Curfew Applies to All

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¶9. (C) U Maung Myint confirmed the imposition of a curfew from 9pm to 5am in Rangoon and Mandalay. The MFA expected all people residing in these cities, including diplomatic staff, to follow the curfew. The German Ambassador opined that the military will be unable to patrol all areas of the city, and instead will focus on the blockades zones around Sule Pagoda, Shwe Dagon Pagoda, Kan Daw Kyi Lake, and Aung San Suu Kyi's residence.

#### Comment

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¶10. (C) Only the GOB believes that its own rhetoric that the U.S. and the other usual suspects are behind the demonstrations. But maybe not even the GOB really believes, since they are unwilling to talk with their own people or the press. None of the assembled diplomats accepted the explanation. We are disappointed that the UNDP representative attempted to downplay popular desire for political change, although the blithe dismissal of socio-economic concerns by U Maung Myint reveals how out of touch the authorities are in their isolated capital.

VILLAROSA